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THE WEIRD OF LOVE AND DEATH.

"O inhabitant of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars, how gracious shalt thou be when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail."—Jeremiah, xxii. 23.

"Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house, which was toward the north; and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz."—Ezekiel, viii. 14.

"And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.

"But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

"For, behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck."—St. Luke, xxiii. 27, 28.

The author of the following verses makes no claim to be a translator, but merely an interpreter of a chapter from the Brick Bible of Babylon. He has relied upon the scholarship of others for his letter, but has sought its spirit not only beneath the text, but in the actual world of love and death. Special students of comparative religions indeed know the truth of Shakespeare's 59th sonnet:

"If there be nothing new, but that which is
Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled,
Which, laboring for invention, bear amiss
The second burthen of a former child!"

But the author has seen no other English version, in poetic form, of this oldest Semitic Gospel of the Resurrection, which, however old it be, is itself a translation, like the Greek Christian Gospels, from earlier originals.¹ Adonis has his Greek Gospels also, but only the apocryphal have come down to us, and these have found ample embodiment in Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis."

The author has welded to the story of the Descent of Istar, two fragmentary hymns from the same literature invoking the Divine Pair, which common invocation is confirmed by the passage of Jeremiah (xxii. 18) whose Hebrew text should read, according to Prof. T. K. Cheyne: "Alas, my Brother, alas, my Sister! Alas, Adon, [Lord] alas Dodah! [Beloved Lady: a title of Istar]."

The cult of Dumu-zi-abzu (Sumerian or Akkadian "True Son of the Deep Water") whom the Hebrews alternately adored and abhorred as Tammuz, took, in its migration from the shore of the Persian Gulf to the Ægean and Sicilian coasts, only his Semitic title of "Adon." But in the course of transit the divinity first became obscured and then the human reputation. From a benign and mysterious power behind the process of spring, or a general symbol of the life principle of which winter deprives nature and death bereaves love, he became a demi-godlike huntsman and paramour of Aphrodite the goddess of beauty. Finally, in modern parlance, his epithet has dwindled to signify a pretty youth. Though coming from further east, the worship of Tammuz had its most famous seat at Aphaca (now Afka) about fifteen miles from the Phenician coast near the source of a torrent now called Ibrahim. In that ravine a crude but grand cosmic hypothesis was narrowed to a vulgar superstition. The site became a pagan Loretto or Lourdes, and developed a perverse traffic in sacred things which gave to Constantinople in the fourth Christian century the same reason or pretext for suppression that English shrines in the sixteenth century afforded Henry VIII.

The swift stream was miraculously tinged each year with the blood of the dying god whose title it then bore. It is said that the same geologic conditions still perform the annual miracle. In the Vale of Aphaca the triumph as well as the agony of a divine victim were localized, just as later they were at Jerusalem. From Aphaca to Galilee it is but eighty miles by crow-flight, and to Nazareth less

¹ Dr. Alfred Jeremias has published the original text of the Descent of Istar with a literal German translation. An English version founded on Dr. Jeremias's translation, appeared in *The Open Court*. See Carus, "Babylonian and Hebrew Views of Man's Fate After Death," XV, p. 357.

than one hundred. Indeed, at Bethlehem (the "House of Bread") which lies seventy miles further south, the adoration of Tammuz, as an earlier fruit of the wheat than the Christian eucharist wafer, lingered in the days of St. Jerome. Though an enormous ethical distance separates the personality of Jesus from the mythical boar-chaser of Lebanon, the dogmas of Chaldea show that the traditions of the church rest on more than one foundation. The Egyptian Gospel of Osiris is another corner-stone.

The modest figure of the Virgin Mother Mary has little in common with the proud and passionate image of Istar, Ashtaroth or Astarte. Rather has the concept of her borrowed the attributes of the gracious Egyptian Isis. Istar's exchange of curses with her infernal sister, as told in clay, may nevertheless have stirred the religious feelings of her votaries among the fish-wives of Babylon. But there remains something in the grief of the divine bride for her lost bridegroom which forecasts the plastic pathos of Michelangelo's "Pieta" and is echoed in the rich harmonies of Rossini's "Stabat Mater Dolorosa."

To realm whence no echo is borne,
 to region no pioneer showeth;
 To the Castle of Darkness Substantial,
 to Yesterday's shadowy shore,
 Our Lady Astarte, whose beacon
 for lovers and mariners gloweth
 At morning and even, descended
 and smote on the dust-laden door.

"Now open the gate unto me,
 grim warden that keepest the marches!
 I would enter the Kingdom of Death!"
 cried Our Lady, the mystical Bride.
 "Unless to my summons thou hearken,
 thy gate I will rend from its arches,
 Setting free to outnumber the living,
 the spirits of men that have died!"

To Lady Astarte, the warden
that watcheth the entrance of Hades
Made reply: "Till I take to my mistress
thy word, prithee, Istar, forbear!"
(A feud for eternity lay
'twixt the lovely and terrible ladies,
So how should Death bid Love be welcome,
and ope to a rival her lair?)

To pitiless Queen of Irkalla
the seneschal doubtfully wended:
"Sov'reign Lady of Death, at the precinct
thy sister Astarte doth stand.
Methinks that in quest of the life-giving
water the Queen hath descended;
The bars of thy mansion are shaken
beneath her imperious hand."

To him said Queen Allat: "O warden,
as grain from the scythe of a reaper
To the Dungeon of Dust falleth Istar
imploing the water of life!
Like lip of reed that is thirsty
her need is for Tammuz the Sleeper:
But what are her sorrow and yearning
to us, or her menace of strife?"

"Quoth she: 'For the hero I mourn
that hath left his wife widow'd and lonely.
I lament for the bride whose embraces
her husband hath lost and deplored;
For fate of the innocent children
whose span bore the spring-blossom only;
So lend me the water of life,
For the healing of Tammuz my Lord!"

“Yet, warden, we grant her caprice!
Suffer Istar to enter our portal
In conformity strict to the letter
of Death’s incompassionate law.
Deprive her of every adornment
as if she were humble and mortal;
Extinguish the glory of Istar
that filleth the heavens with awe!”

The warden returning, threw open
the porch of Irkalla to Istar.
“Thou art welcome to Death, O dread Lady!
Let Ghostland rejoice in its guest!
'T is mine to conduct thee, O Queen,
to the presence of Allat, thy sister!”
But as she stepp’d over the threshold
he plucked from her forehead the crest.

“My crown with the crescent and star
give back to me!” Istar besought him.
“Nay, my Princess, the code of the kingdom
of Death even thou must obey!”
Through Second Gate when they immersed,
as the ruler of Hades had taught him,
The warden of gloom took from Istar
The radiant ear-rings away.

And so at each barrier passed,
the Queen of her robe he divested,
And the necklace, the brooch and the belt
and the bracelets he claim’d as his prey.
Relentless and brutal he was;
When Our Lady Astarte protested,
Repeating: “Nay, Princess, the edict
of Death even thou must obey!”

So into the hall of the hopeless,
 the court of Queen Allat the Dreary,
All dishevelled, discrowned and dismantled
 Our Lady Astarte he led.
Though her aspect was that of despair,
 for her trials were many and weary,
Not dumb was Our Lady at sight
 of the sinister Queen of the Dead.

She cursed her with formula dire,
 with a torrent of bitter invective,
And she wept more in rage than in sorrow,
 recounting the insults of Death.
The face of the monarch of Hades
 grew scornfully sweet and reflective,
Nor uttered she one interruption
 till Istar expended her breath,

Then spake with a delicate malice
 these ominous words unto Istar:
"Since thou quittest the world, not a beast
 of the wilderness seeketh a mate,
Nor egg hath been hatched by a fowl,
 O gentle and courteous sister
Who threat'nest my realm with invasion,
 but leavest thine own desolate!

"The maids of the men are unconscious,
 no men to the maids make advances;
And the cradles are empty and rock'd
 by the hands of no mothers to-day;
Their music the forests have lost,
 the cities are stilled of their dances;
The land of the living is stagnant
 since Istar to Death came away.

“My thralls thou hast sought to suborn,
by promising thou wouldst deliver
From the dust of the grave to adore thee
again on thy double-horned throne—
In truth, O Astarte, it seemeth,
now Love hath discarded her quiver,
The task would be light for annexing
the Kingdom of Life to mine own!

“Ho, Namtar! Take Istar and plague her
with sixty-fold measure of illness!
Assail her with chastening agues
and darken the flame of her eyes!
Let agony reign in her bosom,
her ears have the horror of stillness!
Let clouds gather over her spirit!
Let languor her limbs paralyse!”

Through creation there mounted a shudder
to throne of the Father Eternal;
To the One whose dominion is screened
by the awful illusion of space.
All nature cried out at the tyranny
seized by the power infernal;
In conclave aghast at the rumor
the sons of God each took his place.

“’T is June, but the leafage hath fallen;
’t is summer, but rime crusteth over
All the meads of the planets with whiteness;
’t is season for rain, but a drought
The field of ephemeral life
with a brown desolation doth cover;
The fire of Astarte is dim;
from the tomb cometh Tammuz not out!”

So Pápsukal, angel of light,
unto Marduk the Sun-god repeated,
Who arose and went up to his Father
and bowed in the Presence with tears.
The lord of the hours for grace
of the Infinite Spirit entreated
To call back Our Lady Astarte
from Death to her place in the spheres.

From mind of the Father Eternal
in likeness not man nor yet woman,
Did a messenger come to creation,
with countenance fair and serene.
By myriad titles invoked on the
stammering lips that are human,
Among them "Atsú-su-namír,"
and it meaneth "His Rising is seen."

"To realm whence no echo is borne,
to region no pioneer showeth;
To the Castle of Darkness Substantial;
to Yesterday's shadowy shore
Descend!" quoth the Infinite One,
"for the calm of the tempest that bloweth
From Allat the Queen of Irkalla,
the dame of the seven-fold door!

"Command her, in name of her Father,
to give from the Fount of Revival
Unto Istar her captive a draught
for the raising of Tammuz the Slain.
If pity she will not bestow
on the need of her sister and rival,
Then warn her how fragile Death's fetter
the gods Love and Life to restrain!"

More swift than the flight of a star
 was the radiant herald in falling,
Through the limitless ether convey'd
 on the thought of the Uttermost God.
O'er the Sea of Oblivion borne
 to the Island of Silence appalling
Where hinges of Hell broke asunder
 at touch of a magical rod.

Yet Allat, the Queen of the Dead,
 at the luminous shape hurl'd reviling:
"Though I may not deny nor delay
 my Father's unwelcome behest,
Atsú-su-namír, with the face
 that is evermore hopeful and smiling,
I curse thee, who bringest His will!"
 and she beat her implacable breast.

"Go, Namtar, and knock at the pillars
 that hold up the base of our dwelling;
Bid the gnomes in their cavern assemble
 and sit on their benches of gold;
Let Istar the water receive
 that in Fount of Revival is welling,
And bring back the goddess before us;
 her boon we no more may withhold."

Though grudgingly made the release,
 through the seven-fold gate Lady Istar
In her strength and her beauty renewed,
 from the Castle of Darkness hath gone.
No warden might check or betray,
 no padlock nor bar might resist her;
With mantle and jewels restored
 her figure resplendently shone.

She bore in her hand a bright chalice
 for wakening Tammuz the Sleeper;
For Adonis, the First-fruits of Death,
 an immortal libation she poured;
While hymns from the farthest confines
 of creation grew louder and deeper,
As flowers and fishes and beasts
 with mankind her arising adored:

“In Valley of Life there is growing
 a tree amaranthine and shady;
From the grail of the crystal abyss
 the sap of its verdure is drawn;
In heart of the earth it is rooted,
 its leaves form the nest of Our Lady
Whose star in the highway of Heaven
 enlight’neth the dusk and the dawn!

“Enshrined in a mystery sweet
 is Adonis the Beautiful lying
On the lap of the Mother Divine
 who lamented him cruelly slain.
There bloometh the garden of love,
 and the flower of life is undying,
Beyond the soft veil of the temple
 that hideth the deities twain!

“O Tammuz, our Lord and our Shepherd!
 Miraculous Bridegroom of Istar!
Thou hast conquer’d the stronghold of Death
 and thou leadest thy people like sheep!
Thou wert as the wheat in the field
 that a wind of the desert doth blister,
Like tree of acacia with root
 that a treacherous river doth steep!

“Our Lady, whose star in the sky
 bringeth hope to the heart heavy-laden,
And whose justice on earth is a lion,
 whose mercy a lamb at the breast,
O Queen of the House of the Shepherd,
 O Mistress of Love ever-maiden,
May infinite joy be upon thee,
 thy grief be forever at rest!”

EDWARD GILCHRIST.

SWATOW, CHINA.